



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 20, 2005

PROJECT AND CONTRACTING OFFICE

BAGHDAD, IRAQ



Contact: Jenna Bisenius
PCO Public Affairs
+964-790-192-5846
+1-914-822-2089
+1-703-544-6839

Jenna.bisenius@pco-iraq.net
www.rebuilding-iraq.net

PCO Participates in Second National Iraqi Women's Conference

BAGHDAD, Iraq – In an effort to educate women on their rights within the new Iraqi constitution and encourage their increased involvement in community and government affairs, the Ministry of Women's Issues held the Second National Iraqi Women's Conference Aug. 3-4 at the International Zone convention center.

Nearly 300 women from all over Iraq attended the conference, listening intently to presenters from various organizations, including speakers such as Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Laith Kubba, representatives from the National Assembly, the Civil Society & Constitution, Homeland Security & Constitution, NGOs such as the Hope Organization and leading women's institutions.

The Project & Contracting Office (PCO) participated in the conference as well, with a speech delivered by PCO Women's Issue Coordinator Azza Humadi as provided by PCO Program Director Karen Durham-Aguilera. In addition, several women from PCO Programs were able to attend the initial part of the conference. Durham-Aguilera's speech was provided in English and Arabic and was later covered by two independent Iraqi newspapers.

In addition to listening to guest speakers, conference attendees were able to attend workshops where they sat in groups of 10 to learn more about the new constitution, how to participate in leadership positions, network with others, fill out referendums from different parties where they were asked their opinion and how they envision the new Iraq, and discuss ways to participate in the new constitution. At one point during the conference, members were asked to stand for a moment of silence in remembrance of those killed in Iraq due to the war and terrorist activities.

PCO personnel participating in the conference took their role very seriously, says Humadi, who feels the event was an important one for Iraqi women.

"When Karen asked me to deliver her speech, I was happy for two reasons," she said. "One, because I was representing a lady who I very much admire due to all her hard work to improve both this country and work opportunities for Iraqi women, and two, because it would enable me to meet this great audience that is eager to learn about and participate in the changes that are taking place right now in Iraq."



In her speech, Durham-Aguilera encouraged women to find ways to be a part of the political process in Iraq, saying, "Iraqi women's involvement in decisions regarding the future of their country will be an important tool for the country in moving beyond war to stability and self-reliance."

Attending conferences such as this one was an important example of such participation according to Durham-Aguilera, who said, "This conference is a clear demonstration of democracy in action in Iraq."

Conferences geared towards Iraqi women can be a great opportunity for both learning and networking says Durham-Aguilera. "We recently sponsored a Business Day for Iraqi women-



PROJECT AND CONTRACTING OFFICE

BAGHDAD, IRAQ

owned engineering and construction businesses to increase the opportunities for women to gain awards for reconstruction projects. Before that day, there was one award to a women-owned business for a police station renovation. After the Business Day, there have been nearly 30 new project awards to Iraqi women-owned businesses."

"Additionally, she continued, "many more firms are learning how to successfully bid and qualify for awards of construction projects. We have hundreds of Iraqi associates, many of them women, working as engineers, architects, project managers, accountants and other professions on the reconstruction program. These professionals are also receiving technical training so that they may increase their skills and further assist the nation of Iraq. This is an ongoing coaching and learning effort, and we expect increased successes."

The infrastructure of Iraq is undergoing major changes, most of them positive, according to Durham-Aguilera, who cited several PCO projects as examples. "As the Director of PCO Programs, I oversee a \$12 billion program of reconstruction projects ongoing over the entire country. And additional funds are improving women's access to quality healthcare, including maternal and child health."

"PCO reconstruction includes 22 hospital renovations, she continued. "Seventeen of these are maternity and children's hospitals. There are also five expanded health care centers planned, with five of these for maternity and pediatrics, and 142 new primary health care centers throughout Iraq.

Durham-Aguilera said other PCO work includes 800 school renovations, educational and training academies, improvements in essential services for water treatment and water supply, electricity and more. Of these, more than 2,800 projects have started and nearly 1,600 completed, with much of the work being contracted directly to Iraqi companies.

"I am honored to be serving in Iraq and helping the Iraqi people achieve economic growth and personal stability in their everyday lives," said Aguilera, who added that she believes the numerous challenges faced by Iraq have severely affected the advancement of Iraqi women. "Support is required for the advancement of women and their capacities in society so that the nation may continue to grow and prosper for all."

"We consider Iraqi women's involvement in the reconstruction process essential to shaping the country's future and ensuring gender equity in constitutional processes," she summarized. "The role and status of women reflect the development of society. When women prosper, the entire country prospers."

- End -

The Project and Contracting Office (PCO) is responsible for contract management and execution of approximately \$12.1 billion of the \$18.4 billion Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF) designated by the US Congress to support the reconstruction of the Iraq. The office reports to the US Department of the Army and Department of Defense on matters relating to contracting and project management, and to the US Department of State's Iraq Reconstruction Management Office on matters relating to project requirements and priorities. For more information please contact Tom Leonard at 1-914-822-5316 or visit our website at: www.rebuilding-iraq.net.